

For Immediate Release
November 12, 1996

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**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's HMO, Health Options, Inc.,
Awarded National Medicare Managed Care Demonstration Project**

JACKSONVILLE -- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's (BCBSF) health maintenance organization, Health Options, Inc., has been awarded a national Medicare managed care demonstration project that will enhance and expand medical services for patients with End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) in three South Florida counties. Health Options is one of only four HMOs nationwide that was awarded the project by the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA).

"Our primary objective with this demonstration project is to enhance the quality of life for the 4788 patients in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties who are impacted by this disease," said Lynn Esposito, director, Office of Program Development for BCBSF.

Esposito explained that Health Options will focus its efforts on an integrated care delivery system that utilizes a continuous quality improvement model of service.

"This will include ensuring that patients have superior access to preventative services additional medications, and other enhanced benefits, including transportation, to coordinate the full spectrum of their care," she said.

Government figures indicate that approximately \$10 billion is spent annually on ESRD patients through the Medicare system.

According to Esposito, Health Options also intends to provide patients with psychosocial and rehabilitation educational programs as part of the project's integrated approach. In addition, a multi-disciplinary team consisting of a nephrologist, nurse practitioner, case manager, social worker, rehabilitation specialist and facility staff will provide coordinated patient care.

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"We plan to offer enrollees a full range of medical benefits, with emphasis on preventative and diagnostic services specifically designed to improve their overall health," Esposito added.

Health Options intends to utilize selected providers from its network in the three-county area for the demonstration project. They include dialysis facilities, nephrology physicians, and a transplant facility. Other providers have been identified and will provide transportation, rehabilitation, nursing home, and home dialysis services. "As with every aspect of the project, the emphasis will be on provider services that reflect only the highest quality care," said Esposito.

Although HCFA provides funding to fully underwrite development costs for the ESRD project, Health Options elected to absorb these costs itself to underscore its total commitment to getting the program up and running for the patients who need it, Esposito explained. Health Options hopes to have the project in operation by the fall of 1997.

"We want to effectively manage this illness within a comprehensive delivery system that is patient centered. Getting the best care available to ESRD patients quickly and efficiently will make a tremendous difference in the quality of their lives," Esposito said.

BCBSF and Health Options, Inc., are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies nationwide. A financially strong, tax-paying mutual insurance company, BCBSF is subject to the same regulation by the Department of Insurance as other insurers operating in Florida.

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